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HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

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Native Plant Profile.....Wild Asters

There are over 120 species of the genus aster found in the United States. Asters are primarily known for their fall flowering, especially in fields. But wild asters can be found in swamps, bogs, woods and fields. Some of these species can be a wonderful addition to a wild acres backyard.

The large double-flowered asters you see in catalogs and garden centers, belong to a different genus, *Callistephus*, which is native to Asia. It has only been in recent years that our native genus Aster has been recognized by the commercial nurseries as a useful late summer to fall bloomer in the garden. The various shapes of the leaves; arrowhead, heart-shaped, toothless or toothed, leaves clasping to the stem or almost linear, makes for interesting textures when planted in groups.

The late blooming of the asters, some even lasting until killing frosts of November provide a late nectar source for butterflies and other insects. If you keep the seed heads up through the fall and winter, the asters seed serves as food for tree sparrows, goldfinches, chipmunks and if you live in woods or near a woods, ruffed grouse and wild turkey.

There are about 16 species of wild asters that can be found commercially. Most reach a height of 1 to 5 feet, and are suitable for various soils. Here is a brief listing of some you may find suitable for your wild acres.



Aster cordifolius
Blue Wood Aster

Good for rocky woods, meadows,
drought tolerant



Aster macrophyllus
Big Leaf Aster

Excellent plant to provide cooler along
woods edge, good wildlife cover as
well as nectar source



Aster novi-belgii
New York Aster

Violet to blue flowers bloom from July to
October and can be used in a
landscape or in a native meadow as a
butterfly nectar source



Aster divaricatus
White Wood Aster

Provides late summer and fall food for
wildlife, shade tolerant



Aster pilosus
Heath Aster

This plant will grow on disturbed sites, will tolerate shade, will continue to bloom well
after the fall frost providing that last nectar source for migrating butterflies.



Aster puniceus
Purple Stemmed Aster



Aster novae-angliae
New England Aster

This species is considered one of the



Aster prenanthoides
Zigzag Aster

This aster will withstand the urban

This aster will bloom well unto November, with deep violet flowers, which late fall, insects find attractive. **Note:** This aster is often planted in food plots to attract deer.

best to plant for late season food and cover for butterflies. Its bright purple flowers make it attractive to plant in full sun locations.

habitat, blooms from August to October as a butterfly nectar source

Maryland Wildlife: Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)

The Northern Mockingbird is a year round resident of Maryland. It has earned the nickname “American Nightingale” for its amazing vocal ability to imitate almost any noise or song. Many of the bird’s songs are very melodious, but sometimes the non-stop all night singing in the summertime can be a bit tiring. Mockingbirds learn new songs all their lives. Males sing more than the females, with unmated males singing more than mated birds. Females will chose as their mates those males that sing the most complex, varied vocalizations.



Click on links below to hear the song and the call of a Mockingbird:	
Mockingbird Song	The mockingbird is well known for mimicking many sounds. They can sing up to about 200 songs and can make sounds like insects and amphibians. They can also imitate sounds like a barking dog, farm animals and a squeaky hinge.
Mockingbird Call	

Mockingbirds raise two broods a year, with nesting taking place in Maryland from late April to early August. Each nesting consist of 3 to 4 blue- green eggs, which hatch in 10 to 12 days. The young birds leave the nest approximately 12 days later. Both male and female adult birds make the twig grass-lined cupped nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young. Nests are usually made no more than 15 feet above the ground. These birds prefer using trees and shrubs that supply dense, protective cover. It is thought that the expansion of the Mockingbird into northern parts of the U.S. was in part due to the establishment of hedgerows.



These birds are highly territorial, especially when nesting and raising their young. It is not unusual for Mockingbirds to chase other birds and peck at pets and people, which venture too close to their young. Remember it is against both state and federal law to harm a Mockingbird. If you are having problems with one attacking you in Maryland, please contact our wildlife damage hotline toll free in the state at 1-877-463-6497.

Adult Mockingbirds are a streamlined 9 inches in length, with both sexes similar in color. Juvenile birds are similar to adults except for spotted breasts. The birds are gray in color on top with white underneath. White wing bars are a distinct ID along with the white patch in the wing showing as the bird flies. These birds have yellow eyes, slender dark bills, and black legs.

Mockingbirds eat a variety of insects in the spring and summer, especially beetles, ants and grasshoppers. During this time they are mainly insectivorous. These birds are berry

lovers throughout the year. Holly, mulberry, raspberries, blueberries, dogwood, elderberries, hackberries, pyracantha, grapes, and pokeberry are all favorites of the species and will attract them to an area. These birds even enjoy the berries of the poison ivy vine! Vines that attract Mockingbirds include greenbrier and Virginia creeper.

Water provided year-round is also a big attractant for this songbird. These birds will also use suet feeders in the winter. Fruit feeders and platform feeders with slices of apples, and raisins with help supplement their winter diet.

It is thought that Mockingbirds are one of the most well known birds in North America. The bird is the state bird of several southern states. This songbird’s population status is considered stable and possibly increasing in its northern range.

Gardens for Dogs

You can have a garden for wildlife and your dog. It will take some planning and trying some tricks to keep your canine from tearing up your wildlife habitat, but it can happen.

Figure out a separate place in your yard for the dog to play in. A shaded area works quite well. Use some sort of mulch for this area. You should also fill it with a mix of sand since many dogs like to dig. When the sand is dry the soil/ sand mixture will not cling to the fur. You could also consider giving your dog its own sandbox. If your dog is digging in pursuit of prey consider ways discouraging animals from entering that part of the yard. If the dog likes to dig up sections of the yard, put down chicken wire, burying the edges deep so they cannot pull the wire out. This also works in the garden as well.

Use only nontoxic plants in your garden. Cornell University has an excellent site for this information at www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html. Remember using integrated pest management on your wild acres is also good for your pet as many lawn chemicals can harm your dog as well as wildlife.

Mulches that are hard to walk on will keep dogs from traveling through your garden area. Try pinecone mulch around the site.

Hollies and barberries are thorny and prickly and can serve as a living fence to keep dogs out of an area as well as provide year round food and cover for wildlife. You can also landscape around your dogs paths. To keep the pet on the path line it with raised beds. Simple wire mesh fences can also be installed. Make sure they are at least 5-foot high and bury them at least a foot beneath the ground. This will also help keep rabbits and ground hogs out of the garden. Do not forget to make the pathway you want the dog on to be lined with soft materials. If the pathway is uncomfortable to the dog's paws, they will make a new, unwanted route through your garden.



Dogs love to smell and walk around plants they are investigating. Place plants around your dog's paths that can take this activity. Some wildlife friendly plants that can survive this sort of action include creeping phlox, verberna, coneflower, and Black-eyed Susans. Tough wildlife friendly shrubs are laurel, rhododendron and viburnums. Small trees suitable for wildlife and resist dog damage are serviceberry, dogwood , pines and quince.

the book,
Dog Friendly Gardens-Garden Friendly Dogs by Cheryl Smith,
which was the inspiration for this article.

Note: The author of this article recommends checking out



Hardscaping



Landscaping is a familiar term to those gardening for wildlife...but hardscaping?

Hardscaping is defined as non-plant items being placed in a landscape to define an area or add a certain style to the area. All when arranged in a pleasing way show the beauty of the plants. The following list of non-plant item includes some suggestions.

- Retaining walls
- Pathways
- Steps
- Benches
- Gazebos
- Gazing balls



- Trellises
- Birdbaths
- Ceramic pots
- Fountains
- Rocks
- Sundials



Birdbaths show vertical interest, as well as provide water. Gazing balls reflect garden colors and add dimensions to a garden. You may choose to float one on your wildlife pond or place one on a pedestal in the middle of your butterfly/hummingbird garden. Even birdhouses are considered hardscaping! The bird box plans listed on our wild acres site provide nesting sites and blend well in many types of landscaping designs.

Consider what blends naturally with your wildlife garden, wood, iron, concrete are materials that can be shaped and colored to blend with a wildlife garden. Remember when choosing materials for your hardscaping consider how well it will stand up to the elements without fading or chipping. Also try to avoid sharp edges, as they may be a safety concern.

If you are on a budget and cannot afford fancy planters or sculptures, try planting some of your plants in an old boot, or wheelbarrow. Old farm or garden equipment can serve as unique trellises for your vines.

Do not forget the placement of benches in your hardscaping. A bench in your lunar or moth garden will allow you to enjoy the fragrances of the flowers attracting the moths. The same holds true for seating by your wildlife water garden.



If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

Acknowledgements:

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- Photograph of Northern Mockingbird courtesy of George Jameson, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, USGS.
- Mockingbird song and call recordings courtesy of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, USGS
- Photographs of dog-friendly garden designs courtesy of DeAnna Glory Designs, San Francisco.
- Photographs of *Aster cordifolius*, *Aster macrophyllus*, and *Aster prenanthoides* courtesy of Thomas G. Barnes @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Barnes, T.G. & S.W. Francis. 2004. Wildflowers and ferns of Kentucky. University Press of Kentucky.
- Photograph of *Aster divaricatus* and *Aster novi-belgii* courtesy of R. Harrison Wiegand, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Heritage Service
- Photograph of *Aster novae-angliae* courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Chesapeake Bay Field Office
- Photograph of *Aster pilosus* courtesy of Merel R. Black, Robert W. Freckmann Herbarium, University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point
- Photograph of *Aster puniceus* courtesy of Missouri Botanical PlantFinder

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

Wild Acres

Habitat for Wildlife

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